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The Last Chronicle of Barset

BY

ANTHONY TROLLOPE.

With Illustrations by G. H. Thomas

SMITH, ELDER, & Co.

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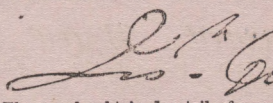

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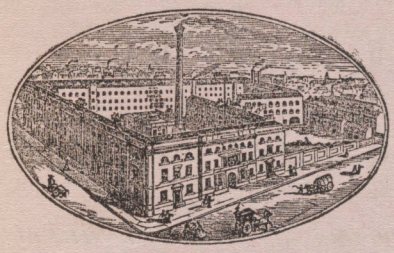

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POSY AND HER GRANDPAPA.

CHAPTER XLIX.

NEAR THE CLOSE.

I WONDER whether any one will read these pages who has never known anything of the bitterness of a family quarrel? If so, I shall have a reader very fortunate, or else very cold-blooded. It would be wrong to say that love produces quarrels; but love does produce those intimate relations of which quarrelling is too often one of the consequences,—one of the consequences which frequently seem to be so natural, and sometimes seem to be unavoidable. One brother rebukes the other,—and what brothers ever lived together between whom there was no such rebuking?—then some warm word is misunderstood and hotter words follow and there is a quarrel. The husband tyrannizes, knowing that it is his duty to direct, and the wife disobeys, or only partially obeys, thinking that a little independence will become her,—and so there is a quarrel. The father, anxious only for his son's good, looks into that son's future with other eyes than those of his son himself,—and so there is a quarrel. They come very easily, these quarrels, but the quittance from them is sometimes terribly difficult. Much of thought is necessary before the angry man can remember that he too in part may have been wrong; and any attempt at such thinking is almost beyond the power of him who is carefully nursing his wrath, lest it cool! But the nursing of such quarrelling kills all happiness. The very man who is nursing his wrath, lest it cool,—his wrath against one whom he loves perhaps the best of all whom it has been given him to love,—is himself wretched as long as it lasts. His anger poisons every pleasure of his life. He is sullen

at his meals, and cannot understand his book as he turns its pages. His work, let it be what it may, is ill done. He is full of his quarrel, —nursing it. He is telling himself how much he has loved that wicked one, how many have been his sacrifices for that wicked one, and that now that wicked one is repaying him simply with wickedness! And yet the wicked one is at that very moment dearer to him than ever. If that wicked one could only be forgiven how sweet would the world be again! And yet he nurses his wrath.

So it was in these days with Archdeacon Grantly. He was very angry with his son. It is hardly too much to say that in every moment of his life, whether waking or sleeping, he was thinking of the injury that his son was doing him. He had almost come to forget the fact that his anger had first been roused by the feeling that his son was about to do himself an injury,—to cut his own throat. Various other considerations had now added themselves to that, and filled not only his mind but his daily conversation with his wife. How terrible would be the disgrace to Lord Hartletop, how incurable the injury to Griselda, the marchioness, should the brother-in-law of the one, and the brother of the other, marry the daughter of a convicted thief! "Of himself he would say nothing." So he declared constantly, though of himself he did say a great deal. "Of himself he would say nothing, though of course such a marriage would ruin him in the county." "My dear," said his wife, "that is nonsense. That really is nonsense. I feel sure there is not a single person in the county who would think of the marriage in such a light." Then the archdeacon would have quarrelled with his wife too, had she not been too wise to admit such a quarrel. Mrs. Grantly was very wise and knew that it took two persons to make a quarrel. He told her over and over again that she was in league with her son,—that she was encouraging her son to marry Grace Crawley. "I believe that in your heart you wish it," he once said to her. "No, my dear, I do not wish it. I do not think it a becoming marriage. But if he does marry her, I should wish to receive his wife in my house, and certainly should not quarrel with him." "I will never receive her," the archdeacon had replied; "and as for him, I can only say that in such case I will make no provision for his family."

It will be remembered that the archdeacon had on a former occasion instructed his wife to write to their son and tell him of his father's determination. Mrs. Grantly had so manœuvred that a little time had been gained, and that those instructions had not been insisted upon in all their bitterness. Since that time Major Grantly had renewed his assurance that he would marry Grace Crawley if Grace Crawley would

accept him,—writing on this occasion direct to his father,—and had asked his father whether, in such case, he was to look forward to be disinherited. "It is essential that I should know," the major had said, "because in such case I must take immediate measures for leaving this place." His father had sent him back his letter, writing a few words at the bottom of it. "If you do as you propose above, you must expect nothing from me." The words were written in large round handwriting, very hurriedly, and the son when he received them perfectly understood the mood of his father's mind when he wrote them.

Then there came tidings, addressed on this occasion to Mrs. Grantly, that Cosby Lodge was to be given up. Lady-day had come, and the notice, necessarily to be given at that period, was so given. "I know this will grieve you," Major Grantly had said, "but my father has driven me to it." This, in itself, was a cause of great sorrow, both to the archdeacon and to Mrs. Grantly, as there were circumstances connected with Cosby Lodge which made them think that it was a very desirable residence for their son. "I shall sell everything about the place and go abroad at once," he said in a subsequent letter. "My present idea is that I shall settle myself at Pau, as my income will suffice for me to live there, and education for Edith will be cheap. At any rate I will not continue in England. I could never be happy here in circumstances so altered. Of course I should not have left my profession, unless I had understood from my father that the income arising from it would not be necessary to me. I do not, however, mean to complain, but simply tell you that I shall go." There were many letters between the mother and son in those days. "I shall stay till after the trial," he said. "If she will then go with me, well and good; but whether she will or not, I shall not remain here." All this seemed to Mrs. Grantly to be peculiarly unfortunate, for, had he not resolved to go, things might even yet have righted themselves. From what she could now understand of the character of Miss Crawley, whom she did not know personally, she thought it probable that Grace, in the event of her father being found guilty by the jury, would absolutely and persistently refuse the offer made to her. She would be too good, as Mrs. Grantly put it to herself, to bring misery and disgrace into another family. But should Mr. Crawley be acquitted, and should the marriage then take place, the archdeacon himself might probably be got to forgive it. In either case there would be no necessity for breaking up the house at Cosby Lodge. But her dear son Henry, her best beloved, was obstinate and stiff-necked, and would take no advice. "He is even worse than his father," she said, in her short-lived anger,

to her own father, to whom alone at this time she could unburden her griefs, seeking consolation and encouragement.

It was her habit to go over to the deanery at any rate twice a week at this time, and on the occasion of one of the visits so made, she expressed very strongly her distress at the family quarrel which had come among them. The old man took his grandson's part through and through. "I do not at all see why he should not marry the young lady if he likes her. As for money, there ought to be enough without his having to look for a wife with a fortune."

"It is not a question of money, papa."

"And as to rank," continued Mr. Harding, "Henry will not at any rate be going lower than his father did when he married you;—not so low indeed, for at that time I was only a minor canon, and Mr. Crawley is in possession of a benefice."

"Papa, all that is nonsense. It is, indeed."

"Very likely, my dear."

"It is not because Mr. Crawley is only perpetual curate of Hogglestock, that the archdeacon objects to the marriage. It has nothing to do with that at all. At the present moment he is in disgrace."

"Under a cloud, my dear. Let us pray that it may be only a passing cloud."

"All the world thinks that he was guilty. And then he is such a man:—so singular, so unlike anybody else! You know, papa, that I don't think very much of money, merely as money."

"I hope not, my dear. Money is worth thinking of, but it is not worth very much thought."

"But it does give advantages, and the absence of such advantages must be very much felt in the education of a girl. You would hardly wish Henry to marry a young woman who, from want of money, had not been brought up among ladies. It is not Miss Crawley's fault, but such has been her lot. We cannot ignore these deficiencies, papa."

"Certainly not, my dear."

"You would not, for instance, wish that Henry should marry a kitchen-maid."

"But is Miss Crawley a kitchen-maid, Susan?"

"I don't quite say that."

"I am told that she has been educated infinitely better than most of the young ladies in the neighbourhood," said Mr. Harding.

"I believe that her father has taught her Greek; and I suppose she has learned something of French at that school at Silverbridge."

"Then the kitchen-maid theory is sufficiently disposed of," said Mr. Harding, with mild triumph.

"You know what I mean, papa. But the fact is, that it is impossible to deal with men. They will never be reasonable. A marriage such as this would be injurious to Henry; but it will not be ruinous; and as to disinheriting him for it, that would be downwright wicked."

"I think so," said Mr. Harding.

"But the archdeacon will look at it as though it would destroy Henry and Edith altogether, while you speak of it as though it were the best thing in the world."

"If the young people love each other, I think it would be the best thing in the world," said Mr. Harding.

"But, papa, you cannot but think that his father's wish should go for something," said Mrs. Grantly, who, desirous as she was on the one side to support her son, could not bear that her husband should, on the other side, be declared to be altogether in the wrong.

"I do not know, my dear," said Mr. Harding; "but I do think, that if the two young people are fond of each other, and if there is anything for them to live upon, it cannot be right to keep them apart. You know, my dear, she is the daughter of a gentleman." Mrs. Grantly upon this left her father almost brusquely, without speaking another word on the subject; for, though she was opposed to the vehement anger of her husband, she could not endure the proposition now made by her father.

Mr. Harding was at this time living all alone in the deanery. For some few years the deanery had been his home, and as his youngest daughter was the dean's wife, there could be no more comfortable resting-place for the evening of his life. During the last month or two the days had gone tediously with him; for he had had the large house all to himself, and he was a man who did not love solitude. It is hard to conceive that the old, whose thoughts have been all thought out, should ever love to live alone. Solitude is surely for the young, who have time before them for the execution of schemes, and who can, therefore, take delight in thinking. In these days the poor old man would wander about the rooms, shambling from one chamber to another, and would feel ashamed when the servants met him ever on the move. He would make little apologies for his uneasiness, which they would accept graciously, understanding, after a fashion, why it was that he was uneasy. "He ain't got nothing to do," said the housemaid to the cook, "and as for reading, they say that some of the young ones can read all day sometimes, and all night too; but, bless you, when you're

nigh eighty, reading don't go for much." The housemaid was right as to Mr. Harding's reading. He was not one who had read so much in his earlier days as to enable him to make reading go far with him now that he was near eighty. So he wandered about the room, and sat here for a few minutes, and there for a few minutes, and though he did not sleep much, he made the hours of the night as many as was possible. Every morning he shambled across from the deanery to the cathedral, and attended the morning service, sitting in the stall which he had occupied for fifty years. The distance was very short, not exceeding, indeed, a hundred yards from a side-door in the deanery to another side-door into the cathedral; but short as it was there had come to be a question whether he should be allowed to go alone. It had been feared that he might fall on his passage and hurt himself; for there was a step here, and a step there, and the light was not very good in the purlieus of the old cathedral. A word or two had been said once, and the offer of an arm to help him had been made; but he had rejected the proffered assistance,—softly, indeed, but still firmly,—and every day he tottered off by himself, hardly lifting his feet as he went, and aiding himself on his journey by a hand upon the wall when he thought that nobody was looking at him. But many did see him, and they who knew him,—ladies generally of the city,—would offer him a hand. Nobody was milder in his dislikings than Mr. Harding; but there were ladies in Barchester upon whose arm he would always decline to lean, bowing courteously as he did so, and saying a word or two of constrained civility. There were others whom he would allow to accompany him home to the door of the deanery, with whom he delighted to linger and chat if the morning was warm, and to whom he would tell little stories of his own doings in the cathedral services in the old days, when Bishop Grantly had ruled in the diocese. Never a word did he say against Bishop Proudie, or against Bishop Proudie's wife; but the many words which he did say in praise of Bishop Grantly,—who, by his showing, was surely one of the best of churchmen who ever walked through this vale of sorrow,—were as eloquent in dispraise of the existing prelate as could have been any more clearly-pointed phrases. This daily visit to the cathedral, where he would say his prayers as he had said them for so many years, and listen to the organ, of which he knew all the power and every blemish as though he himself had made the stops and fixed the pipes, was the chief occupation of his life. It was a pity that it could not have been made to cover a larger portion of the day.

It was sometimes sad enough to watch him as he sat alone. He

would have a book near him, and for a while would keep it in his hands. It would generally be some volume of good old standard theology with which he had been, or supposed himself to have been, conversant from his youth. But the book would soon be laid aside, and gradually he would move himself away from it, and he would stand about in the room, looking now out of a window from which he would fancy that he could not be seen, or gazing up at some print which he had known for years; and then he would sit down for a while in one chair, and for a while in another, while his mind was wandering back into old days, thinking of old troubles and remembering his old joys. And he had a habit, when he was sure that he was not watched, of creeping up to a great black wooden case, which always stood in one corner of the sitting-room which he occupied in the deanery. Mr. Harding, when he was younger, had been a performer on the violoncello, and in this case there was still the instrument from which he had been wont to extract the sounds which he had so dearly loved. Now in these latter days he never made any attempt to play. Soon after he had come to the deanery there had fallen upon him an illness, and after that he had never again asked for his bow. They who were around him,—his daughter chiefly and her husband,—had given the matter much thought, arguing with themselves whether or no it would be better to invite him to resume the task he had so loved; for of all the works of his life this playing on the violoncello had been the sweetest to him; but even before that illness his hand had greatly failed him, and the dean and Mrs. Arabin had agreed that it would be better to let the matter pass without a word. He had never asked to be allowed to play. He had expressed no regrets. When he himself would propose that his daughter should "give them a little music,"—and he would make such a proposition on every evening that was suitable,—he would never say a word of those former performances at which he himself had taken a part. But it had become known to Mrs. Arabin, through the servants, that he had once dragged the instrument forth from its case when he had thought the house to be nearly deserted; and a wail of sounds had been heard, very low, very short-lived, recurring now and again at fitful intervals. He had at those times attempted to play, as though with a muffled bow,—so that none should know of his vanity and folly. Then there had been further consultations at the deanery, and it had been again agreed that it would be best to say nothing to him of his music.

In these latter days of which I am now speaking he would never draw the instrument out of its case. Indeed he was aware that it was

too heavy for him to handle without assistance. But he would open the prison door, and gaze upon the thing that he loved, and he would pass his fingers among the broad strings, and ever and anon he would produce from one of them a low, melancholy, almost unearthly sound. And then he would pause, never daring to produce two such notes in succession,—one close upon the other. And these last sad moans of the old fiddle were now known through the household. They were the ghosts of the melody of days long past. He imagined that his visits to the box were unsuspected,—that none knew of the folly of his old fingers which could not keep themselves from touching the wires; but the voice of the violoncello had been recognized by the servants and by his daughter, and when that low wail was heard through the house,—like the last dying note of a dirge,—they would all know that Mr. Harding was visiting his ancient friend.

When the dean and Mrs. Arabin had first talked of going abroad for a long visit, it had been understood that Mr. Harding should pass the period of their absence with his other daughter at Plumstead; but when the time came he begged of Mrs. Arabin to be allowed to remain in his old rooms. "Of course I shall go backwards and forwards," he had said. "There is nothing I like so much as a change now and then." The result had been that he had gone once to Plumstead during the dean's absence. When he had thus remonstrated, begging to be allowed to remain in Barchester, Mrs. Arabin had declared her intention of giving up her tour. In telling her father of this she had not said that her altered purpose had arisen from her disinclination to leave him alone;—but he had perceived that it was so, and had then consented to be taken over to Plumstead. There was nothing, he said, which he would like so much as going over to Plumstead for four or five months. It had ended in his having his own way altogether. The Arabins had gone upon their tour, and he was left in possession of the deanery. "I should not like to die out of Barchester," he said to himself in excuse to himself for his disinclination to sojourn long under the archdeacon's roof. But, in truth, the archdeacon, who loved him well and who, after a fashion, had always been good to him,—who had always spoken of the connexion which had bound the two families together as the great blessing of his life,—was too rough in his greetings for the old man. Mr. Harding had ever mixed something of fear with his warm affection for his elder son-in-law, and now in these closing hours of his life he could not avoid a certain amount of shrinking from that loud voice,—a certain inaptitude to be quite at ease in that commanding presence. The dean, his second son-in-law, had been a modern friend

in comparison with the archdeacon; but the dean was more gentle with him; and then the dean's wife had ever been the dearest to him of human beings. It may be a doubt whether one of the dean's children was not now almost more dear, and whether in these days he did not have more free communication with that little girl than with any other human being. Her name was Susan, but he had always called her Posy, having himself invented for her that soubriquet. When it had been proposed to him to pass the winter and spring at Plumstead, the suggestion had been made alluring by a promise that Posy also should be taken to Mrs. Grantly's house. But he, as we have seen, had remained at the deanery, and Posy had remained with him.

Posy was now five years old, and could talk well, and had her own ideas of things. Posy's eyes,—hers, and no others besides her own,—were allowed to see the inhabitant of the big black case; and now that the deanery was so nearly deserted, Posy's fingers had touched the strings, and had produced an infantine moan. "Grandpa, let me do it again." Twang! It was not, however, in truth, a twang, but a sound as of a prolonged dull, almost deadly, hum-m-m-m-m! On this occasion the moan was not entirely infantine,—Posy's fingers having been something too strong,—and the case was closed and locked, and grandpapa shook his head.

"But Mrs. Baxter won't be angry," said Posy. Mrs. Baxter was the housekeeper in the deanery, and had Mr. Harding under her especial charge.

"No, my darling; Mrs. Baxter will not be angry, but we mustn't disturb the house."

"No," said Posy, with much of important awe in her tone; "we mustn't disturb the house; must we, grandpapa?" And so she gave in her adhesion to the closing of the case. But Posy could play cat's-cradle, and as cat's-cradle did not disturb the house at all, there was a good deal of cat's-cradle played in these days. Posy's fingers were so soft and pretty, so small and deft, that the dear old man delighted in taking the strings from them, and in having them taken from his own by those tender little digits.

On the afternoon after the conversation respecting Grace Crawley which is recorded in the early part of this chapter, a messenger from Barchester went over to Plumstead, and a part of his mission consisted of a note from Mrs. Baxter to Mrs. Grantly, beginning, "Honoured Madam," and informing Mrs. Grantly, among other things, that her "respected papa," as Mrs. Baxter called him, was not quite so well as usual; not that Mrs. Baxter thought there was much the matter.

Mr. Harding had been to the cathedral service, as was usual with him, but had come home leaning on a lady's arm, who had thought it well to stay with him at the door till it had been opened for him. After that "Miss Posy" had found him asleep, and had been unable,—or if not unable, unwilling, to wake him. "Miss Posy" had come down to Mrs. Baxter somewhat in a fright, and hence this letter had been written. Mrs. Baxter thought that there was nothing "to fright" Mrs. Grantly, and she wasn't sure that she should have written at all only that Dick was bound to go over to Plumstead with the wool; but as Dick was going, Mrs. Baxter thought it proper to send her duty, and to say that to her humble way of thinking perhaps it might be best that Mr. Harding shouldn't go alone to the cathedral every morning. "If the dear reverend gentleman was to get a tumble, ma'am," said the letter, "it would be awkward." Then Mrs. Grantly remembered that she had left her father almost without a greeting on the previous day, and she resolved that she would go over very early on the following morning,—so early that she would be at the deanery before her father should have gone to the cathedral.

"He ought to have come over here, and not stayed there by himself," said the archdeacon, when his wife told him of her intention.

"It is too late to think of that now, my dear; and one can understand, I think, that he should not like leaving the cathedral as long as he can attend it. The truth is he does not like being out of Barchester."

"He would be much better here," said the archdeacon. "Of course you can have the carriage and go over. We can breakfast at eight; and if you can bring him back with you, do. I should tell him that he ought to come." Mrs. Grantly made no answer to this, knowing very well that she could not bring herself to go beyond the gentlest persuasion with her father, and on the next morning she was at the deanery by ten o'clock. Half-past ten was the hour at which the service began. Mrs. Baxter contrived to meet her before she saw her father, and begged her not to let it be known that any special tidings of Mr. Harding's failing strength had been sent from the deanery to Plumstead. "And how is my father?" asked Mrs. Grantly. "Well, then, ma'am," said Baxter, "in one sense he's finely. He took a morsel of early lamb to his dinner yesterday, and relished it ever so well,—only he gave Miss Posy the best part of it. And then he sat with Miss Posy quite happy for an hour or so. And then he slept in his chair; and you know, ma'am, we never wakes him.

And after that old Skulpit toddled up from the hospital,"—this was Hiram's Hospital, of which establishment, in the city of Barchester, Mr. Harding had once been the warden and kind master, as has been told in former chronicles of the city,—"and your papa has said, ma'am, you know, that he is always to see any of the old men when they come up. And Skulpit is sly, and no better than he should be, and got money from your father, ma'am, I know. And then he had just a drop of tea, and after that I took him his glass of port wine with my own hands. And it touched me, ma'am, so it did, when he said, 'Oh, Mrs. Baxter, how good you are; you know well what it is I like.' And then he went to bed. I listened hard,—not from idle cur'osity, ma'am, as you, who know me, will believe, but just because it's becoming to know what he's about, as there might be an accident, you know, ma'am." "You are very good, Mrs. Baxter, very good." "Thank ye, ma'am, for saying so. And so I listened hard; but he didn't go to his music, poor gentleman; and I think he had a quiet night. He doesn't sleep much at nights, poor gentleman, but he's very quiet; leastwise he was last night." This was the bulletin which Mrs. Baxter gave to Mrs. Grantly on that morning before Mrs. Grantly saw her father.

She found him preparing himself for his visit to the cathedral. Some year or two,—but no more,—before the date of which we are speaking, he had still taken some small part in the service; and while he had done so he had of course worn his surplice. Living so close to the cathedral,—so close that he could almost walk out of the house into the transept,—he had kept his surplice in his own room, and had gone down in his vestment. It had been a bitter day to him when he had first found himself constrained to abandon the white garment which he loved. He had encountered some failure in the performance of the slight clerical task allotted to him, and the dean had tenderly advised him to desist. He did not utter one word of remonstrance. "It will perhaps be better," the dean had said. "Yes,—it will be better," Mr. Harding had replied. "Few have had accorded to them the high privilege of serving their Master in His house for so many years,—though few more humbly, or with lower gifts." But on the following morning, and for nearly a week afterwards, he had been unable to face the minor canon and the vergers, and the old women who knew him so well, in his ordinary black garments. At last he went down with the dean, and occupied a stall close to the dean's seat,—far away from that in which he had sat for so many years,—and in this seat he had said his prayers ever since that day. And now his surplices were

washed and ironed and folded and put away; but there were moments in which he would stealthily visit them, as he also stealthily visited his friend in the black wooden case. This was very melancholy, and the sadness of it was felt by all those who lived with him; but he never alluded himself to any of those bereavements which age brought upon him. Whatever might be his regrets, he kept them ever within his own breast.

Posy was with him when Mrs. Grantly went up into his room, holding for him his hat and stick while he was engaged in brushing a suspicion of dust from his black gaiters. "Grandpapa, here is aunt Susan," said Posy. The old man looked up with something,—with some slightest sign of that habitual fear which was always aroused within his bosom by visitations from Plumstead. Had Mrs. Arabin thoroughly understood the difference in her father's feeling toward herself and toward her sister, I think she would hardly have gone forth upon any tour while he remained with her in the deanery. It is very hard sometimes to know how intensely we are loved, and of what value our presence is to those who love us! Mrs. Grantly saw the look,—did not analyse it, did not quite understand it,—but felt, as she had so often felt before, that it was not altogether laden with welcome. But all this had nothing to do with the duty on which she had come; nor did it, in the slightest degree, militate against her own affection. "Papa," she said, kissing him, "you are surprised to see me so early?"

"Well, my dear, yes;—but very glad all the same. I hope everybody is well at Plumstead?"

"Everybody, thank you, papa."

"That is well. Posy and I are getting ready for church. Are we not, Posy?"

"Grandpapa is getting ready. Mrs. Baxter won't let me go."

"No, my dear, no;—not yet, Posy. When Posy is a great girl she can go to cathedral every day. Only then, perhaps, Posy won't want to go."

"I thought that, perhaps, papa, you would sit with me a little while this morning, instead of going to morning prayers."

"Certainly, my dear,—certainly. Only I do not like not going;—for who can say how often I may be able to go again? There is so little left, Susan,—so very little left."

After that she had not the heart to ask him to stay, and therefore she went with him. As they passed down the stairs and out of the doors she was astonished to find how weak were his footsteps,—how

powerless he was against the slightest misadventure. On this very day he would have tripped at the upward step at the cathedral door had she not been with him. "Oh, papa," she said, "indeed, indeed, you should not come here alone." Then he apologized for his little stumble with many words and much shame, assuring her that anybody might trip on an occasion. It was purely an accident; and though it was a comfort to him to have had her arm, he was sure that he should have recovered himself even had he been alone. He always, he said, kept quite close to the wall, so that there might be no mistake,—no possibility of an accident. All this he said volubly, but with confused words, in the covered stone passage leading into the transept. And, as he thus spoke, Mrs. Grantly made up her mind that her father should never again go to the cathedral alone. He never did go again to the cathedral,—alone.

When they returned to the deanery, Mr. Harding was fluttered, weary, and unwell. When his daughter left him for a few minutes he told Mrs. Baxter, in confidence, the story of his accident, and his great grief that his daughter should have seen it. "Laws amercy, sir, it was a blessing she was with you," said Mrs. Baxter; "it was, indeed, Mr. Harding." Then Mr. Harding had been angry, and spoke almost crossly to Mrs. Baxter; but, before she left the room, he found an opportunity of begging her pardon,—not in a set speech to that effect, but by a little word of gentle kindness, which she had understood perfectly. "Papa," said Mrs. Grantly to him as soon as she had succeeded in getting both Posy and Mrs. Baxter out of the room,—against the doing of which, Mr. Harding had manœuvred with all his little impotent skill,—"Papa, you must promise me that you will not go to the cathedral again alone, till Eleanor comes home." When he heard the sentence he looked at her with blank misery in his eyes. He made no attempt at remonstrance. He begged for no respite. The word had gone forth, and he knew that it must be obeyed. Though he would have hidden the signs of his weakness had he been able, he would not condescend to plead that he was strong. "If you think it wrong, my dear, I will not go alone," he said. "Papa, I do; indeed, I do. Dear papa, I would not hurt you by saying it if I did not know that I am right." He was sitting with his hand upon the table, and, as she spoke to him, she put her hand upon his, caressing it. "My dear," he said, "you are always right."

She then left him again for awhile, having some business out in the city, and he was alone in his room for an hour. What was there left to him now in the world? Old as he was, and in some things almost

childish, nevertheless, he thought of this keenly, and some half-realized remembrance of "the lean and slippered pantaloon" flitted across his mind, causing him a pang. What was there left to him now in the world? Posy and cat's-cradle! Then, in the midst of his regrets, as he sat with his back bent in his old easy-chair, with one arm over the shoulder of the chair, and the other hanging loose by his side, on a sudden there came across his face a smile as sweet as ever brightened the face of man or woman. He had been able to tell himself that he had no ground for complaint,—great ground rather for rejoicing and gratitude. Had not the world and all in it been good to him; had he not children who loved him, who had done him honour, who had been to him always a crown of glory, never a mark for reproach; had not his lines fallen to him in very pleasant places; was it not his happy fate to go and leave it all amidst the good words and kind loving cares of devoted friends? Whose latter days had ever been more blessed than his? And for the future——? It was as he thought of this that that smile came across his face,—as though it were already the face of an angel. And then he muttered to himself a word or two. "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace. Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace."

When Mrs. Grantly returned she found him in jocund spirits. And yet she perceived that he was so weak that when he left his chair he could barely get across the room without assistance. Mrs. Baxter, indeed, had not sent to her too soon, and it was well that the prohibition had come in time to prevent some terrible accident. "Papa," she said, "I think you had better go with me to Plumstead. The carriage is here, and I can take you home so comfortably." But he would not allow himself to be taken on this occasion to Plumstead. He smiled and thanked her, and put his hand into hers, and repeated his promise that he would not leave the house on any occasion without assistance, and declared himself specially thankful to her for coming to him on that special morning;—but he would not be taken to Plumstead. "When the summer comes," he said, "then, if you will have me for a few days!"

He meant no deceit, and yet he had told himself within the last hour that he should never see another summer. He could not tell even his daughter that after such a life as this, after more than fifty years spent in the ministrations of his darling cathedral, it specially behoved him to die,—as he had lived,—at Barchester. He could not say this to his eldest daughter; but had his Eleanor been at home, he could have said it to her. He thought he might yet live to see his

Eleanor once again. If this could be given to him he would ask for nothing more.

On the afternoon of the next day, Mrs. Baxter wrote another letter, in which she told Mrs. Grantly that her father had declared, at his usual hour of rising that morning, that as he was not going to the cathedral he would, he thought, lie in bed a little longer. And then he had lain in bed the whole day. "And, perhaps, honoured madam, looking at all things, it's best as he should," said Mrs. Baxter.

CHAPTER L.

LADY LUFTON'S PROPOSITION.

It was now known throughout Barchester that a commission was to be held by the bishop's orders, at which inquiry would be made,—that is, ecclesiastical inquiry,—as to the guilt imputed to Mr. Crawley in the matter of Mr. Soames's cheque. Sundry rumours had gone abroad as to quarrels which had taken place on the subject among certain clergymen high in office; but these were simply rumours, and nothing was in truth known. There was no more discreet clergyman in all the diocese than Dr. Tempest, and not a word had escaped from him as to the stormy nature of that meeting in the bishop's palace, at which he had attended with the bishop,—and at which Mrs. Proudie had attended also. When it is said that the fact of this coming commission was known to all Barsetshire, allusion is of course made to that portion of the inhabitants of Barsetshire to which clerical matters were dear;—and as such matters were specially dear to the inhabitants of the parish of Framley, the commission was discussed very eagerly in that parish, and was specially discussed by the Dowager Lady Lufton.

And there was a double interest attached to the commission in the parish of Framley by the fact that Mr. Robarts, the vicar, had been invited by Dr. Tempest to be one of the clergymen who were to assist in making the inquiry. "I also propose to ask Mr. Oriel of Greshamsbury to join us," said Dr. Tempest. "The bishop wishes to appoint the other two, and has already named Mr. Thumble and Mr. Quiverful, who are both residents in the city. Perhaps his lordship may be right in thinking it better that the matter should not be left altogether in the hands of clergymen who hold livings in the diocese. You are no doubt

aware that neither Mr. Thumble nor Mr. Quiverful do hold any benefice." Mr. Robarts felt,—as everybody else did feel who knew anything of the matter,—that Bishop Proudie was singularly ignorant in his knowledge of men, and that he showed his ignorance on this special occasion. "If he intended to name two such men he should at any rate have named three," said Dr. Thorne. "Mr. Thumble and Mr. Quiverful will simply be outvoted on the first day, and after that will give in their adhesion to the majority." "Mr. Thumble, indeed!" Lady Lufton had said, with much scorn in her voice. To her thinking, it was absurd in the highest degree that such men as Dr. Tempest and her Mr. Robarts should be asked to meet Mr. Thumble and Mr. Quiverful on a matter of ecclesiastical business. Outvoted! Of course they would be outvoted. Of course they would be so paralyzed by fear at finding themselves in the presence of real gentlemen, that they would hardly be able to vote at all. Old Lady Lufton did not in fact utter words so harsh as these; but thoughts as harsh passed through her mind. The reader therefore will understand that much interest was felt on the subject at Framley Court, where Lady Lufton lived with her son and her daughter-in-law.

"They tell me," said Lady Lufton, "that both the archdeacon and Dr. Tempest think it right that a commission should be held. If so, I have no doubt that it is right."

"Mark says that the bishop could hardly do anything else," rejoined Mrs. Robarts.

"I daresay not, my dear. I suppose the bishop has somebody near him to tell him what he may do, and what he may not do. It would be terrible to think of, if it were not so. But yet, when I hear that he has named such men as Mr. Thumble and Mr. Quiverful, I cannot but feel that the whole diocese is disgraced."

"Oh, Lady Lufton, that is such a strong word," said Mrs. Robarts.

"It may be strong, but it is not the less true," said Lady Lufton.

And from talking on the subject of the Crawleys, Lady Lufton soon advanced, first to a desire for some action, and then to acting. "I think, my dear, I will go over and see Mrs. Crawley," said Lady Lufton the elder to Lady Lufton the younger. Lady Lufton the younger had nothing to urge against this; but she did not offer to accompany the elder lady. I attempted to explain in the early part of this story that there still existed a certain understanding between Mrs. Crawley and Lord Lufton's wife, and that kindnesses occasionally passed from Framley Court to Hogglestock Parsonage; but on this occasion young Lady Lufton,—the Lucy Robarts who had once passed certain days of

her life with the Crawleys at Hogglestock,—did not choose to accompany her mother-in-law; and therefore Mrs. Robarts was invited to do so. "I think it may comfort her to know that she has our sympathy," the elder woman said to the younger as they made their journey together.

When the carriage stopped before the little wicket-gate, from whence a path led through a ragged garden from the road to Mr. Crawley's house, Lady Lufton hardly knew how to proceed. The servant came to the door of the carriage, and asked for her orders. "H—m—m, ha, yes; I think I'll send in my card;—and say that I hope Mrs. Crawley will be able to see me. Won't that be best; eh, Fanny?" Fanny, otherwise Mrs. Robarts, said that she thought that would be best; and the card and message were carried in.

It was happily the case that Mr. Crawley was not at home. Mr. Crawley was away at Hoggle End, reading to the brickmakers, or turning the mangles of their wives, or teaching them theology, or politics, or history, after his fashion. In these days he spent, perhaps, the happiest hours of his life down at Hoggle End. I say that his absence was a happy chance, because, had he been at home, he would certainly have said something, or done something, to offend Lady Lufton. He would either have refused to see her, or when seeing her he would have bade her hold her peace and not interfere with matters which did not concern her, or,—more probable still,—he would have sat still and sullen, and have spoken not at all. But he was away, and Mrs. Crawley sent out word by the servant that she would be most proud to see her ladyship, if her ladyship would be pleased to alight. Her ladyship did alight, and walked into the parsonage, followed by Mrs. Robarts.

Grace was with her mother. Indeed Jane had been there also when the message was brought in, but she fled into back regions, overcome by shame as to her frock. Grace, I think, would have fled too, had she not been bound in honour to support her mother. Lady Lufton, as she entered, was very gracious, struggling with all the power of her womanhood so to carry herself that there should be no outwardly visible sign of her rank or her wealth,—but not altogether succeeding. Mrs. Robarts, on her first entrance, said only a word or two of greeting to Mrs. Crawley, and kissed Grace, whom she had known intimately in early years. "Lady Lufton," said Mrs. Crawley, "I am afraid this is a very poor place for you to come to; but you have known that of old, and therefore I need hardly apologize."

"Sometimes I like poor places best," said Lady Lufton. Then

there was a pause, after which Lady Lufton addressed herself to Grace, seeking some subject for immediate conversation. "You have been down at Allington, my dear, have you not?" Grace, in a whisper, said that she had. "Staying with the Dales, I believe? I know the Dales well by name, and I have always heard that they are charming people."

"I like them very much," said Grace. And then there was another pause.

"I hope your husband is pretty well, Mrs. Crawley?" said Lady Lufton.

"He is pretty well,—not quite strong. I daresay you know, Lady Lufton, that he has things to vex him?" Mrs. Crawley felt that it was the need of the moment that the only possible subject of conversation in that house should be introduced; and therefore she brought it in at once, not loving the subject, but being strongly conscious of the necessity. Lady Lufton meant to be good-natured, and therefore Mrs. Crawley would do all in her power to make Lady Lufton's mission easy to her.

"Indeed yes," said her ladyship; "we do know that."

"We feel so much for you and Mr. Crawley," said Mrs. Robarts; "and are so sure that your sufferings are unmerited." This was not discreet on the part of Mrs. Robarts, as she was the wife of one of the clergymen who had been selected to form the commission of inquiry; and so Lady Lufton told her on their way home.

"You are very kind," said Mrs. Crawley. "We must only bear it with such fortitude as God will give us. We are told that He tempers the wind to the shorn lamb."

"And so He does, my dear," said the old lady, very solemnly. "So He does. Surely you have felt that it is so?"

"I struggle not to complain," said Mrs. Crawley.

"I know that you struggle bravely. I hear of you, and I admire you for it, and I love you." It was still the old lady who was speaking, and now she had at last been roused out of her difficulty as to words, and had risen from her chair, and was standing before Mrs. Crawley. "It is because you do not complain, because you are so great and so good, because your character is so high, and your spirit so firm, that I could not resist the temptation of coming to you. Mrs. Crawley, if you will let me be your friend, I shall be proud of your friendship."

"Your ladyship is too good," said Mrs. Crawley.

"Do not talk to me after that fashion," said Lady Lufton. "If you do I shall be disappointed, and feel myself thrown back. You

know what I mean." She paused for an answer; but Mrs. Crawley had no answer to make. She simply shook her head, not knowing why she did so. But we may know. We can understand that she had felt that the friendship offered to her by Lady Lufton was an impossibility. She had decided within her own breast that it was so, though she did not know that she had come to such decision. "I wish you to take me at my word, Mrs. Crawley," continued Lady Lufton. "What can we do for you? We know that you are distressed."

"Yes,—we are distressed."

"And we know how cruel circumstances have been to you. Will you not forgive me for being plain?"

"I have nothing to forgive," said Mrs. Crawley.

"Lady Lufton means," said Mrs. Robarts, "that in asking you to talk openly to her of your affairs, she wishes you to remember that—— I think you know what we mean," said Mrs. Robarts, knowing very well herself what she did mean, but not knowing at all how to express herself.

"Lady Lufton is very kind," said Mrs. Crawley, "and so are you, Mrs. Robarts. I know how good you both are, and for how much it behoves me to be grateful." These words were very cold, and the voice in which they were spoken was very cold. They made Lady Lufton feel that it was beyond her power to proceed with the work of her mission in its intended spirit. It is ever so much easier to proffer kindness graciously than to receive it with grace. Lady Lufton had intended to say, "Let us be women together;—women bound by humanity, and not separated by rank, and let us open our hearts freely. Let us see how we may be of comfort to each other." And could she have succeeded in this, she would have spread out her little plans of succour with so loving a hand that she would have conquered the woman before her. But the suffering spirit cannot descend from its dignity of reticence. It has a nobility of its own, made sacred by many tears, by the flowing of streams of blood from unseen wounds, which cannot descend from its daïs to receive pity and kindness. A consciousness of undeserved woe produces a grandeur of its own, with which the high-souled sufferer will not easily part. Baskets full of eggs, pounds of eleemosynary butter, quarters of given pork, even second-hand clothing from the wardrobe of some richer sister,—even money, unsophisticated money, she could accept. She had learned to know that it was a portion of her allotted misery to take such things,—for the sake of her children and her husband,—and to be thankful for them. She did take them, and was thankful; and in the taking she submitted herself to the

rod of cruel circumstances; but she could not even yet bring herself to accept spoken pity from a stranger, and to kiss the speaker.

"Can we not do something to help you?" said Mrs. Robarts. She would not have spoken but that she perceived that Lady Lufton had completed her appeal, and that Mrs. Crawley did not seem prepared to answer it.

"You have done much to help us," said Mrs. Crawley. "The things you have sent to us have been very serviceable."

"But we mean something more than that," said Lady Lufton.

"I do not know what there is more," said Mrs. Crawley. "A bit to eat and something to wear;—that seems to be all that we have to care for now."

"But we were afraid that this coming trial must cause you so much anxiety."

"Of course it causes anxiety;—but what can we do? It must be so. It cannot be put off, or avoided. We have made up our minds to it now, and almost wish that it would come quicker. If it were once over I think that he would be better whatever the result might be."

Then there was another lull in the conversation, and Lady Lufton began to be afraid that her visit would be a failure. She thought that perhaps she might get on better if Grace were not in the room, and she turned over in her mind various schemes for sending her away. And perhaps her task would be easier if Mrs. Robarts also could be banished for a time. "Fanny, my dear," she said at last, boldly, "I know you have a little plan to arrange with Miss Crawley. Perhaps you will be more likely to be successful if you can take a turn with her alone." There was not much subtlety in her ladyship's scheme; but it answered the proposed purpose, and the two elder ladies were soon left face to face, so that Lady Lufton had a fair pretext for making another attempt. "Dear Mrs. Crawley," she said, "I do so long to say a word to you, but I fear that I may be thought to interfere."

"Oh, no, Lady Lufton; I have no feeling of that kind."

"I have asked your daughter and Mrs. Robarts to go out because I can speak more easily to you alone. I wish I could teach you to trust me."

"I do trust you."

"As a friend, I mean;—as a real friend. If it should be the case, Mrs. Crawley, that a jury should give a verdict against your husband, —what will you do then? Perhaps I ought not to suppose that it is possible."

"Of course we know that is possible," said Mrs. Crawley. Her voice was stern, and there was in it a tone almost of offence. As she spoke she did not look at her visitor, but sat with her face averted and her arms akimbo on the table.

"Yes;—it is possible," said Lady Lufton. "I suppose there is not one in the county who does not truly wish that it may not be so. But it is right to be prepared for all alternatives. In such case have you thought what you will do?"

"I do not know what they would do to him," said she.

"I suppose that for some time he would be——"

"Put in prison," said Mrs. Crawley, speaking very quickly, bringing out the words with a sharp eagerness that was quite unusual to her. "They will send him to gaol. Is it not so, Lady Lufton?"

"I suppose it would be so; not for long I should hope; but I presume that such would be the sentence for some short period."

"And I might not go with him?"

"No; that would be impossible."

"And the house, and the living; would they let him have them again when he came out?"

"Ah; that I cannot say. That will depend much, probably, on what these clergymen will report. I hope he will not put himself in opposition to them."

"I do not know. I cannot say. It is probable that he may do so. It is not easy for a man so injured as he has been, and one at the same time so great in intelligence, to submit himself gently to such inquiries. When ill is being done to himself or others he is very prone to oppose it."

"But these gentlemen do not wish to do him ill, Mrs. Crawley."

"I cannot say. I do not know. When I think of it I see that there is nothing but ruin on every side. What is the use of talking of it? Do not be angry, Lady Lufton, if I say that it is of no use."

"But I desire to be of use,—of real use. If it should be the case, Mrs. Crawley, that your husband should be—detained at Barchester——"

"You mean imprisoned, Lady Lufton."

"Yes, I mean imprisoned. If it should be so, then do you bring yourself and your children,—all of them,—over to Framley, and I will find a home for you while he is lost to you."

"Oh, Lady Lufton; I could not do that."

"Yes, you can. You have not heard me yet. It would not be

a comfort to you in such a home as that to sit at table with people who are partly strangers to you. But there is a cottage nearly adjoining to the house, which you shall have all to yourself. The bailiff lived in it once, and others have lived in it who belong to the place; but it is empty now and it shall be made comfortable." The tears were now running down Mrs. Crawley's face, so that she could not answer a word. "Of course it is my son's property, and not mine, but he has commissioned me to say that it is most heartily at your service. He begs that in such case you will occupy it. And I beg the same. And your old friend Lucy has desired me also to ask you in her name."

"Lady Lufton, I could not do that," said Mrs. Crawley through her tears.

"You must think better of it, my dear. I do not scruple to advise you, because I am older than you, and have experience of the world." This, I think, taken in the ordinary sense of the words, was a boast on the part of Lady Lufton, for which but little true pretence existed. Lady Lufton's experience of the world at large was not perhaps extensive. Nevertheless she knew what one woman might offer to another, and what one woman might receive from another. "You would be better over with me, my dear, than you could be elsewhere. You will not misunderstand me if I say that, under such circumstances, it would do your husband good that you and your children should be under our protection during his period of temporary seclusion. We stand well in the county. Perhaps I ought not to say so, but I do not know how otherwise to explain myself; and when it is known, by the bishop and others, that you have come to us during that sad time, it will be understood that we think well of Mr. Crawley, in spite of anything that a jury may say of him. Do you see that, my dear? And we do think well of him. I have known of your husband for many years, though I have not personally had the pleasure of much acquaintance with him. He was over at Framley once at my request, and I had great occasion then to respect him. I do respect him; and I shall feel grateful to him if he will allow you to put yourself and your children under my wing, as being an old woman, should this misfortune fall upon him. We hope that it will not fall upon him; but it is always well to be provided for the worst."

In this way Lady Lufton at last made her speech and opened out the proposal with which she had come laden to Hogglestock. While she was speaking Mrs. Crawley's shoulder was still turned to her; but the speaker could see that the quick tears were pouring them-

selves down the cheeks of the woman whom she addressed. There was a downright honesty of thorough-going well-wishing charity about the proposition which overcame Mrs. Crawley altogether. She did not feel for a moment that it would be possible for her to go to Framley in such circumstances as those which had been suggested. As she thought of it all at the present moment, it seemed to her that her only appropriate home during the terrible period which was coming upon her, would be under the walls of the prison in which her husband would be incarcerated. But she fully appreciated the kindness which had suggested a measure, which, if carried into execution, would make the outside world feel that her husband was respected in the county, despite the degradation to which he was subjected. She felt all this, but her heart was too full to speak.

"Say that it shall be so, my dear," continued Lady Lufton. "Just give me one nod of assent, and the cottage shall be ready for you should it so chance that you should require it."

But Mrs. Crawley did not give the nod of assent. With her face still averted, while the tears were still running down her cheeks, she muttered but a word or two. "I could not do that, Lady Lufton; I could not do that."

"You know at any rate what my wishes are, and as you become calmer you will think of it. There is quite time enough, and I am speaking of an alternative which may never happen. My dear friend Mrs. Robarts, who is now with your daughter, wishes Miss Crawley to go over to Framley Parsonage while this inquiry among the clergymen is going on. They all say it is the most ridiculous thing in all the world,—this inquiry. But the bishop you know is so silly! We all think that if Miss Crawley would go for a week or so to Framley Parsonage, that it will show how happy we all are to receive her. It should be while Mr. Robarts is employed in his part of the work. What do you say, Mrs. Crawley? We at Framley are all clearly of opinion that it will be best that it should be known that the people in the county uphold your husband. Miss Crawley would be back, you know, before the trial comes on. I hope you will let her come, Mrs. Crawley?"

But even to this proposition Mrs. Crawley could give no assent, though she expressed no direct dissent. As regarded her own feelings, she would much have preferred to have been left to live through her misery alone; but she could not but appreciate the kindness which endeavoured to throw over her and hers in their trouble the ægis of first-rate county respectability. She was saved from the necessity of

giving a direct answer to this suggestion by the return of Mrs. Robarts and Grace herself. The door was opened slowly, and they crept into the room as though they were aware that their presence would be hardly welcomed.

"Is the carriage there, Fanny?" said Lady Lufton. "It is almost time for us to think of returning home."

Mrs. Robarts said that the carriage was standing within twenty yards of the door.

"Then I think we will make a start," said Lady Lufton. "Have you succeeded in persuading Miss Crawley to come over to Framley in April?"

Mrs. Robarts made no answer to this, but looked at Grace; and Grace looked down upon the ground.

"I have spoken to Mrs. Crawley," said Lady Lufton, "and they will think of it." Then the two ladies took their leave, and walked out to their carriage.

"What does she say about your plan?" Mrs. Robarts asked.

"She is too broken-hearted to say anything," Lady Lufton answered. "Should it happen that he is convicted, we must come over and take her. She will have no power then to resist us in anything."

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